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## THE HISTORY OF THE VERNACULAR IN EDUCATION.

### II.

WHILE the vernacular and its literature, especially among the learned classes, were threatened with destruction by the first shock of contact with the newly discovered classics, there were forces at work which tended to keep them alive and to make them ultimately reap advantage from that which at first seemed to be their doom. After a shorter or longer period of decline, the vernacular experienced a period of renaissance in all the countries of Europe. In Italy, where the native idiom lay closer to the Latin, the decline of the vernacular was most marked and its period of longer duration. But even here there were subtle and pervading general influences at work in favor of the vernacular. If scholars looked down with contempt upon the vernacular and its use, still it had become rooted among the common people. It was a living tongue as over against a dead one, and as such possessed a superior power of absorption. The Latin phrases introduced into the Italian dialects by scholars could not take root among the people until they meant something to them, and thus they could never become among the common people such an external part of the language as among scholars. They could not swamp the native idiom; for they first had to adapt themselves to it in an organic fashion so that they functioned in it. Thus by a process of selection the native idiom profited at the expense of the Latin, and quite naturally at just such points as it most needed supplementation in respect to vocabulary, polish, or grace. But the Latin element came in not in an integral fashion, but only by yielding to the genius of the Italian idiom. It was Italianized rather than the Italian becoming Latinized. Scholars found out that if they wanted to be heard by the common people, Latin vocabulary and imitation of Latin structure and style did not count for much. They must digest their classics, assimilate them, and develop new

blood and tissue vitally and organically one with the vernacular which they proposed to use. What is said with reference to the development of the vernacular under the Humanistic impulse in Italy may be applied with varying emphasis to the other European countries subject to the influence of the Revival of Learning.

The renascence of the Italian vernacular did not begin with the scholars. The learned had been drawn away to the study of the classics, and they wrote for a more select and a more universally distributed circle of readers than could be reached through any one mother-tongue. But the people still loved their songs and stories; poetry, music, and devotion are interests that do not wane. Obscure writers, with little or inadequate training in the classics, appealed to the popular interests and attempted to meet the popular demand. Yet this humble class of writers drew gradually into their circle those of greater training and ability.

The gap between the scholars and the people, between the learned and the unlearned, so far as concerns the field of literature, was again beginning to narrow, and the time was drawing nigh when scholarship should not be ashamed to express itself in the mother-tongue. In addition to the pressure from below, that time was hastened by another co-operating factor, namely, the patriotic impulse.

Social and political influences cannot be ignored in the literary and educational history of a people. At Florence, Ferrara, and Naples there was a court life which gave unity to the popular consciousness which centered in those places. At Naples and at Ferrara feudalism had taken firmer root than in most other places in Italy. There the literature of chivalry lingered. The tales of Charlemagne and of King Arthur served as a strong central core of the popular literature. It was not so easily overwhelmed by the first tidal wave of Humanism, and could more easily obey the impulse of the strong feeling of civic unity. At Florence, under the influence of Lorenzo de' Medici, the cause of the vernacular received a strong forward impulse. Lorenzo himself employed the vernacular, yet with an apology for its "lowness, incapacity, and unworthiness to deal with high themes or grave material."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> SYMONDS, *Renaissance in Italy*, "Italian Literature," Vol. I, p. 234.

With Lorenzo de' Medici Humanism advances under the impulse of a new ideal. The discipline and the fine sense of literary appreciation which came from the study of the classical models were made instruments, not of slavish imitation, but of positive reconstruction. Scholars begin to see that in order to produce a work of art the medium does not necessarily have to be that in which the great works of art have been produced in the past. The medium is something which can be molded to use, provided there is a clear grasp of literary principles. Under the spirit of the new Humanism, the prose and the poetry of the Italian language are transformed and beautified by the application of the ideal of classic form. The literature and the language are no longer Ferrarese, Neapolitan, nor Tuscan, but Italian; no longer local, but national. The gulf between the scholar and the layman narrows down until the two classes of literary interests merge once more. The popular tongue and the popular theme resume their place in the world of literature, only on a higher plane of art. Poets of the first rank took up the material of the popular literature, molded it in accordance with the principles of art, and gave it out in the form of works bearing the stamp of culture.<sup>17</sup> With Ariosto and Machiavelli the stage had been reached in which there was certainly no longer any occasion for, or thought of, apology for the use of the vulgar tongue. Its literary position was thoroughly established.

In England art had achieved distinction in the vernacular through the genius of Chaucer. But for a century and a half from his time the vernacular literature languished. One reason for this was undoubtedly the condition of the English language. English, more than any other tongue, is a language whose vocabulary is filled with borrowed words. In the fifteenth century it was suffering especially from a plethora of undigested material, which made it more or less of a mosaic.<sup>18</sup> The inherent laws of its structure had not yet reached maturity, and they groaned under the task of plowing their way through the heterogeneity of its vocabulary. Yet, during this period, English scholars cherished the study of

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 427.

<sup>18</sup> See SAINTSBURY, *The Earlier Renaissance*, chap. 4.

the classics,<sup>19</sup> and through them were educating a higher capacity for culture. But the gap between scholarship and the vernacular seems never to have been so wide as in Italy. In fact, the stream of Humanistic influence came to England from derived sources as well as from the original.

From the fact of this twofold source of Humanistic culture in England, it happened that two men so wide apart in their type of training as Milton and Shakespeare could both be representative of the renascence of the vernacular literature. Milton, drawing directly on the original classical sources, brought the ideal of classical beauty and perfection down into the vernacular, fusing both elements into an indissoluble whole; "he was classical without loss of spontaneity or freshness." Shakespeare, on the other hand, drank in the spirit of the Renaissance as it had manifested itself in the stimulus which it everywhere gave to a higher type of art; and, through the assimilation of this ideal, he brought up the vernacular literature to the classical level. The tremendous literary activity of the Elizabethan period is significant of the supremacy of the mother-tongue henceforth in the literature of England.

In bringing about this literary supremacy of the vernacular in England there is still another factor that ought not to be overlooked, namely, the publication of the King James, or Authorized, version of the Bible, in 1611. The linguistic principle common to both Shakespeare and the English Bible was that of starting with the vernacular, and, working under the inspiration of superior models, bringing up the vernacular, by the selection of those elements which are already prepared to function anew, to a new level of art. Thus the linguistic laws of the mother-tongue are not violated by the imposition of a foreign structure, however superior that may be within its own field.

In France at the end of the Middle Ages poetry had received considerable development, and the lighter forms of narrative prose were beginning to be cultivated. But the language was as yet wholly inadequate to the expression of more serious and reflective thought.

<sup>19</sup> *Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. I, "The Renaissance," p. 491.

The problem of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was to take up this language which was now in a transitional stage on the way from the inflectional to the analytic form and make of it an adequate vehicle for the expression of any and every kind of thought.

One important factor in the perfection of the French vernacular was the movement inaugurated by a group of writers called the Pleiade. The Humanistic movement was consciously diverted from its original channel and made contributory to the cause of the vernacular. The study of Latin and Greek was prosecuted for the sake of finding what these languages had that could be carried away and used in the enrichment of the language and literature of the mother-tongue. Long and persistent practice in the writing of French was conducted under the ideals of art discoverable in the best authors, whether Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, or any other language.<sup>20</sup> With Ronsard and his confrères the study of the classics became a means to the perfection of the vernacular rather than an end in itself. The function of this sort of work cannot be easily overestimated; yet it is easy to see that, after all, such a movement may not come into the closest and most vital relation to the life of the people, and hence may diverge slightly from the true genius of the native tongue. It needs to be supplemented by the work of men who have an overmastering message to convey to the people. The perfection of the language cannot be reached until it has been made the medium of expression for the ideas of such men as Calvin, Descartes, and Pascal.

Calvin's vocabulary is rich and varied, but his words are drawn largely from the mother-tongue. They are words instinct with the life of the vernacular — words either Gallic, or, if from the Latin, preferably those which have gained the quality and tang of the native idiom through their having already functioned in it. Yet at the same time he is strongly under the influence of classicism. The ancient languages have a contribution to make to the modern French through his agency. The French tongue was especially defective in the treatment of clausal rela-

<sup>20</sup> SAINTSBURY, *Short History of French Literature*, p. 199.

tions. Its structure was loose and ill adapted to the close and logical sequence of thought demanded in argument. Now, Calvin was a close thinker, and he was anxious that his thoughts should reach the people. He chose the most vital words that they used, but a loose and conversational array of these, no matter how rich in meaning or how delicately susceptible of expressing fine distinctions, was inadequate to the expression of his thought. He needed a structure the parts of which made up a close-fitting and organic unity. The Latin language afforded models of almost logical perfection in the matter of sentence structure, in the delicate adjustment of independent and subordinate relations within one finely balanced whole. Calvin succeeded, without undue violence to the spirit of the mother-tongue, in introducing into it something of the power of expressing clausal relations with which he was familiar in Latin. The long sentence, so often necessary in the expression of complex trains of thought, became possible, and that too without violation of clearness and simplicity.

With the work of the Ronsardists and Calvin, the French language is in the process of taking its position as a literary tongue. It is not a far reach to Descartes, Corneille, and Pascal, under whom the French vernacular won its position of complete literary independence, yielding alike to the demands of the highest reaches of philosophic and scientific thought, and to the subtlest and most refined poetic sense.

The German language as a tool of literature was even more defective in the sixteenth century than the French. Practically everything of consequence was written in Latin. Translations of the Bible, in whole or in part, together with other religious and devotional literature in the mother-tongue, circulated to a considerable extent. But with the advent of the Reformation there was brought over to the cause of the vernacular a powerful and interested advocate in the person of Luther. Luther's translation of the Bible, like the English version, took advantage of those forms of speech which had already found acceptance with the people. Yet his task was more arduous than that of his English brethren, because the language was in a more chaotic condition.

Luther was a prolific writer and speaker. He, like Calvin, was burdened with a great message which must be brought to the people. If the language was not yet adequate to this task, if its structure was defective, then he took up the obdurate instrument of expression and twisted it and turned it until it would yield to his will. His ideas were vigorous and strong, and they had to find expression in a form which was vigorous and strong. To be sure, the forms which he wrought out were not always elegant and refined; but they were pretty apt to be suitable to the thought which he wished to convey. His terse and strong and homely thought plowed through the resisting material and left its furrows there as a guide to others who wished to go the same way. He almost re-created the German language, and he prepared the way for its more refined as well as its more vigorous use as an instrument of literary, scientific, and philosophic expression.<sup>21</sup>

Luther, Calvin, and Descartes illustrate the power of function in determining structure. Too often we ignore the significance of thought itself as a factor in determining form. The history of the vernacular teaches us that the language process goes on within a situation in which thought demands a medium of expression. The message, the desire to communicate, is one of the chief interacting factors in the development of language. In general, vigor of language, refinement of diction, elegance of style, can come into being only where thought possesses the same qualities. While, on the one hand, thought is dependent on a proper medium, on the other hand, the medium of expression is itself a creation and reflection of thought.

By the seventeenth century (earlier in Italy) the literary position of the vernacular was established generally throughout Europe. But, while the vernacular began to reappear in the sixteenth century stronger than ever before to perform the function of a real language, we find at the same time, as we have already seen, Latin everywhere dominating the schools. That this should be the case during the period of the gross inadequacy of the

<sup>21</sup> See SAINTSBURY, *The Earlier Renaissance*, chap. 5; RUSSELL, *German Higher Schools*, chap. 2; *Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. I, "The Renaissance," pp. 640 ff.



mother-tongue is not a matter of surprise. But that Latin should persist as the chief instrument and end of education for centuries after the strength of the vernacular has been manifested in the realm of literature does seem at first thought a just ground for astonishment. But we must bear in mind that the school is necessarily a conservative institution. It has to stand for the highest ideals of culture and discipline. It does not at once adjust itself to that which is new; or, if it does, it is the victim of innumerable fads. The new has to be tested, proved, and found worthy. This was all the more true when the school stood in a position of greater isolation from the stream of popular and practical life than it does today—when the ideal of education was formal discipline and its end was not so much to make citizens of the many as to make scholars of the few. When the mother-tongue had come into wide use as an instrument of literary activity and its literary position was more or less firmly established, still it was not welcomed in the schools of the day. The vernacular could not yet show that its masterpieces furnished literary models which attained that degree of perfection which characterized those already in use in the schoolroom; and the native tongue was not regarded as an equal to the Latin as an instrument of mental discipline. On the basis of these two principles, Latin prolonged its monopoly of the curriculum beyond the period of its necessity. The cause of Latin was still further strengthened by the fact that men who wrote books, and who thought that their ideas were really valuable, wanted them to reach the world in a form which was more permanent and universal than the rapidly changing and numerous native idioms.

Notwithstanding the strong position of Latin in the schools of the sixteenth century, there was a growing feeling of discontent with the reigning Humanistic education. Even representative classical scholars like Alberti, Erasmus, and Melancthon recognized its insufficiency. Geography, mathematics, astronomy, and natural science, the studies by which the Humanists themselves would supplement the training in Latin and Greek, while they were not at that time taught in the vernacular, were of such

a nature that they might be so taught. *Real*<sup>22</sup> studies in the schools strengthen any existing demand that there may be for the use of the mother-tongue.

In France, Rabelais and Montaigne were satirizing and ridiculing current education, and creating sentiment in favor of training which should be more practical and closer in touch with the needs of life. Likewise the English schoolmaster and scholar, Richard Mulcaster, in the latter part of the sixteenth century, was protesting against the exclusive use of the classical languages in education.

While undoubtedly a part of the defect of the classical education was in the formal methods of study, yet much also was due to its exclusiveness, or lack of breadth. The remedy which Montaigne suggested was in the line of broadening the curriculum. He urged the importance of history, and laid stress on modern languages taking precedence of Latin and Greek.

This bringing of the vernacular definitely to the foreground in education is indicative of a new ideal that is shaping itself in men's minds. It is the forecry in a long struggle of the *Realien* for recognition and ultimate functioning in a well-rounded curriculum which shall meet the needs of the many as over against the few.

The slowness with which the schools moved in the matter of correcting the evils in the traditional methods of education is shown by the fact that the protests which began to appear with Alberti in the fifteenth century are still to be heard in the seventeenth, and even down into the eighteenth, century. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) made vigorous thrusts at Latin and Greek as the sole exponents of culture. But more significant for the cause of the vernacular than this was the work which he did in formulating the laws of induction. Though his work in this respect was imperfect, yet it starts the movement which is ultimately to ground the sciences in their claim to recognition in the curriculum. This kind of enrichment of the course of study always contributes strength to the movement in favor of the mother-tongue. The Port Royalists, De Saci and Guyot, were

<sup>22</sup> The term "real" is used in this paper in its German sense.

also claiming that the study of Latin as conducted was a positive injury to those who wished to use their mother-tongue well.<sup>23</sup>

This general dissatisfaction with Latin and Greek as the sole educational vehicles, with corresponding stress laid on the importance of the vernacular, is partly traceable to an increased value placed upon the *Realien*. It is an age of discovery, invention, and the beginnings of scientific formulation. The world has broadened and deepened with great rapidity. The force of tradition and authority is being broken. There is something new being developed in the way of knowledge which is as worthy of being studied and taught as that which has been handed down by the ancients. The activities of the people of Europe, the experiences of life, have created a demand for, and set a standard of value upon, scientific, commercial, geographical, and historical fact. A new view of education is being developed. There is a groping after, a feeling for, some position in education for these new elements of knowledge which are demanded by the exigencies of the new and changed conditions of life. The isolation of the school is more keenly felt than it was when all of learning was summed up in letters and this learning was of use only to the few. The school is now out of joint with social conditions. There is tension, dissatisfaction, a problem to be defined. The focus of attention shifts to and fro between the disturbing element of the *Realien* and the old, fixed, and customary structure of the classics. With this shifting of attention to and fro there is corresponding confusion, discomfort, discontent. Pending solution, this discontent works two ways to the advantage of the cause of the vernacular. When it views the Latin as unsatisfactory, by the emphasis of reaction it throws stress upon the vernacular. When it operates in the direction of placing the *Realien* in the curriculum, it carries with it in this same movement the mother-tongue as the most suitable instrument for the imparting of instruction. The ideal in these is no longer that of cultivating style or of teaching eloquence; hence the superiority of Latin vanishes at a single stroke. In this way I think we can account for the discontent which, we have seen, prevailed with the reigning Humanistic system of

<sup>23</sup> CADET, *Port Royal Education*, pp. 8 and 163.

education, and at the same time the stress which the critics laid upon the vernacular. This discontent was the beginning of a movement which should not stop with mere protest, but was to develop into measures of practical reform.

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[It is hoped that Mr. Miller will extend these articles, bringing them down to the present day, and publish them in book form.— E. F. Y.]